

# Hepatitis C in Houston

HOUSTON HEPATITIS C TASK FORCE

## FAST FACTS

**There is no vaccine for Hepatitis C Virus (HCV).**

The number of people (**estimated 4.1 million**) with HCV is 4 times the number of people living with HIV.

HCV is 10 times more infectious than HIV (it is easier to acquire when exposed).

HCV is the leading cause of liver transplant in the United States.

## The Basics

### What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) is an infection of the liver that is spread when an uninfected person's blood is exposed to the blood of a person with hepatitis C (Blood-to-Blood Exposure).



The Liver is the organ in the upper left. It is located on the left side of the body, under your rib cage.

### Am I at Risk?

You may be at risk for HCV if:

- You received a blood transfusion before 1992 or blood products before 1987;
- You are a healthcare worker, public safety worker, or a member of the military exposed to blood;
- You are a child born to an infected mother;
- You have shared needles...even once;
- You have snorted drugs;
- You have a tattoo or body piercing.

### What Are the Symptoms?

Most people with HCV do not feel sick until their liver is already damaged. Symptoms include:

- Tiredness;
- Fever, chills, muscle aches, joint pain, and headaches;
- Nausea, aversion to certain foods, unexplained weight loss;
- Psychological problems, like depression;
- Tenderness in the abdomen;
- Yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice).

## What to do if you are at risk for HCV

### Get tested.

HDHHS offers screening to those at risk at all clinics that offer STD services. HCV testing is also available through a variety of community agencies.

For a complete list, please see the Houston Hepatitis C Task Force Resource Guide, or the Hepatitis C Section of the Houston Resource Guide ("Blue Book").

### Take care of your liver.

Eat a healthy and balanced diet. See your healthcare provider for regular checkups. Avoid or drink less alcohol.

Get the hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines.

Be careful when using over-the-counter drugs such as Tylenol and Ibuprofen.

## Houston and Texas Statistics

### Houston

Between 2001 and 2007, the Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) recorded an average of 4976 cases of HCV per year (between 2642 and 6715).

In 2002, HDHHS estimated that among STD clients reporting low risk for HCV, 4% had the virus, while

15% of STD clients at high risk had the virus.

In 2006, HSHHS estimated that of those infected with HCV in Houston, 50% were Black, 27% were White, and 17% were Hispanic. The remaining 6% of cases were among Asians and those whose race was not specified. Males were infected about twice as often as females.

In 2006, HDHHS estimated that 37% of those with HCV in Houston had surgery or a blood transfusion before 1992, 31% had a history of injection drug use, and 16%



### Texas

387,395 Texas (1.79% of all Texans) are reported to be infected with HCV.

Studies of Texas prisoners estimate a HCV infection rate of about 30%, compared with 1.79% of the general population.

*If you are interested in joining the Houston Hepatitis C Task Force, please contact the HDHHS Bureau of HIV/STD and Viral Hepatitis at 713-794-9020*

## HIV and HCV Co-Infection

Studies show that up to 40% of people infected with HIV also have HCV. An estimated 60-90% of people who contracted HIV through injection drug use are also infected with HCV.

The progression of HCV appears to occur 2-5 times

faster in HIV infected individuals than in people with HCV only.

Once HCV damages the liver, the liver has a harder time absorbing HIV medications. HIV and HCV medications can also have negative interactions and have

extreme side effects.

The presence of HCV may slow immune system recovery after HIV treatment is started. People on HIV protease inhibitors can also experience body changes, which result in higher fat in the liver.

## Helpful Resources

**Texas Liver Coalition:** free resources include toll-free helpline and support groups. [www.texasliver.org](http://www.texasliver.org) or (800)72-LIVER

**HCV Advocate:** a comprehensive resource for Viral Hepatitis information in multiple languages. [www.hcvadvocate.org](http://www.hcvadvocate.org)

**Liver Health Today:** mission is to assist hepatitis patients and their families ...by providing current, comprehensive information in one source. (800)792-6317x133 or [www.liverhealthtoday.org](http://www.liverhealthtoday.org)

**CDC Division of Viral Hepatitis**  
[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/index.htm)

For additional resources, please see the Houston Hepatitis C Task Force Resource Guide, or the Hepatitis C Section of the Houston Resource Guide ("Blue Book").

